WHAT ARE DISSOCIATIVE DRUGS

Drugs such as PCP (phencyclidine) and ketamine, which were initially developed as general anesthetics for surgery, distort perceptions of sight and sound and produce feelings of detachment - dissociation - from the environment and self. But these mind-altering effects are not hallucinations. PCP and ketamine are therefore more properly known as "dissociative anesthetics." Dextromethorphan, a widely available cough suppressant, when taken in high doses can produce effects similar to those of PCP and ketamine.

The dissociative drugs act by altering distribution of the neurotransmitter glutamate throughout the brain. Glutamate is involved in perception of pain, responses to the environment, and memory. PCP is considered the typical dissociative drug, and the description of PCP's actions and effects in this Research Report largely applies to ketamine and dextromethorphan as well.